

ABANDONED IN THE CROSSFIRE

How Republican Policies Are Guaranteeing More Child Deaths from Gun Violence

A Companion Volume to Our Collective Betrayal of America's Children



Mel Haas

with research assistance from Perplexity AI

Updated Edition — July 2026

ABANDONED IN THE CROSSFIRE

*How Republican Policies Are Guaranteeing More Child Deaths
from Gun Violence*

A Companion Volume to Our Collective Betrayal of America's Children

By Mel Haas

with research assistance from Perplexity AI

Silver Spring, Maryland — Updated Edition, July 2026

CivicGoodBooks

Description

Abandoned in the Crossfire is an urgent, evidence-based call to action documenting how federal policy choices since January 2025 have repeatedly cut, restored, and threatened again the programs that protect American children from gun violence — even as the national gun-death toll has, encouragingly, continued to decline. Written by a 90-year-old retired aeronautical engineer and grandfather living in a Continuing Care Retirement Community, this updated edition traces the documented policy record through July 2026: canceled and partially restored school mental health grants, defunded community violence intervention programs, a gun violence research budget zeroed out and then preserved by Congress, and a Supreme Court that has just agreed to decide the constitutional fate of assault weapons bans nationwide. It draws a stark parallel to the BYD forced-labor case in Bahia, Brazil — a real-world illustration of what unchecked authoritarian power looks like when human beings become instruments of state and corporate interest — and closes with a concrete, dated action plan for older Americans who refuse to stay silent while children pay the price of political neglect.

Publication Metadata

Title: Abandoned in the Crossfire

Subtitle: How Republican Policies Are Guaranteeing More Child Deaths from Gun Violence

Companion Volume To: Our Collective Betrayal of America's Children

Author: Mel Haas, with research assistance from Perplexity AI

Publisher: CivicGoodBooks

Edition: Updated Edition, July 2026 (Original edition: March 2026)

Location: Silver Spring, Maryland

Word Count: Approximately 11,500 words

Language: English

Subject / Categories: Politics & Social Sciences > Public Policy > Social Services & Welfare; Politics & Social Sciences > Violence in Society; Law > Constitutional Law > Second Amendment; Politics & Social Sciences > Activism & Social Justice

Keywords: gun violence children, Project 2025 children, Republican cuts children programs, MAGA school safety, gun violence prevention funding, BYD Brazil slavery, authoritarian governance children, CCRC activism, grandparents gun violence, child safety Trump, assault weapons ban Supreme Court, intergenerational activism

Target Audience: CCRC residents and older Americans, parents and grandparents concerned about child safety, Democratic activists, community organizers, gun violence prevention advocates

Format: Digital publication, 8.5 x 11 in., Verdana 16pt body text

Abandoned in the Crossfire: How Republican Policies Are Guaranteeing More Child Deaths from Gun Violence

A Companion Volume to Our Collective Betrayal of America's Children

By Mel Haas, with research assistance from Perplexity AI
Silver Spring, Maryland — Updated Edition, July 2026

"The moral test of a government is how it treats those who are at the dawn of life — the children." — Hubert H. Humphrey

"They came to build China's EV future. Investigators found 'slavery-like' conditions." — Washington Post headline, March 2026

A NOTE TO THE READER

This book grows out of a single, searing question that refuses to go away: **If we know that children are dying — and we know exactly why — and we know exactly what is being done to make it worse — what are we waiting for?**

The first volume, *Our Collective Betrayal of America's Children*, documented the moral and philosophical foundations of our duty to children, the roots of gun violence in poverty and isolation, and the complicity of older generations who have grown comfortable while children are murdered. That book called CCRC residents to action.

This volume narrows the lens. It focuses with precision on a single, devastating truth: **The Republican Party, through Project 2025, the Trump administration, the MAGA movement, and their legislative agenda, has made a series of deliberate policy choices that cut the infrastructure protecting children even as the underlying gun-death toll has, encouragingly, continued to fall.** Both things are true at once, and this edition insists on holding them together rather than flattening the story into a single headline: national gun deaths have declined for a fourth straight year (The Trace¹), while the federal programs that helped drive that decline — community violence intervention, school mental health services, gun violence research — have

¹<https://www.thetrace.org/2025/12/data-shooting-stats-gun-violence-america/>

been repeatedly defunded, restored by courts, and threatened again. This is not hyperbole. This is a traceable, documented, cause-and-effect chain from specific policy decisions to real consequences for children, even where the topline numbers are moving in the right direction for now.

It also places that truth in the terrifying context of what authoritarian governance looks like when it reaches its logical conclusion — not in some distant dystopia, but in a BYD factory complex in Bahia, Brazil, where more than 160 Chinese workers were found by investigators in conditions officials described as "slavery-like," a case that as of mid-2026 has produced a court settlement, a since-reversed government blacklisting, and the firing of Brazil's top labor-inspection official amid allegations of political interference (Reuters²; South China Morning Post³). That is what happens when a government treats human beings as instruments of state and corporate power rather than as persons possessing inherent dignity — and how fragile even a democracy's efforts at accountability can be against that power.

Our grandchildren are not there yet. But the road leads in that direction.

²<https://www.reuters.com/>

³<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3349965/brazil-fires-slave-labour-watchdog-chief-after-byd-blacklisting>

This book names the road. It documents the turns that have already been taken — and, in this update, the turns that have since reversed, stalled, or gone further than expected.

And it calls every reader — especially older Americans living in Continuing Care Retirement Communities — to stand in the road and refuse to move.

PROLOGUE: TWO IMAGES

Hold two images in your mind simultaneously.

Image One. A bedroom in Parkland, Florida. A 14-year-old girl's toothpaste cap sits uncapped on the bathroom counter, left there by a child who expected to come home from school. Alyssa Alhadeff never came home. Her bedroom has been kept exactly as she left it, a shrine maintained by parents who cannot bear to close the door on the future that was stolen. Photographer Lou Bopp has documented dozens of these rooms — beds unmade, homework scattered, clothes on chairs — across the years since the Parkland massacre. Each room is a monument to policy failure. Each uncapped toothpaste tube is an indictment.

Image Two. A construction site in Camaçari, Brazil, northeastern Bahia state, December 2024. Brazilian labor inspectors arrive following an anonymous tip and find more than 160 Chinese workers (early reports cited 220; the government's later, formal count was 163 rescued from among 471 workers found to have entered the country illegally) living in what the authorities call "conditions analogous to slavery." The workers have had their passports seized — 107 confiscated. Up to 70 percent of their wages are being withheld. They sleep on beds without mattresses. One toilet serves 31 people. They must request permission to leave their lodgings. They were brought from China by the construction contractor Jinjiang Group, hired to build a factory for the Chinese

electric vehicle manufacturer BYD. Brazilian prosecutors ultimately sued BYD and its contractors for \$45.5 million in damages (BBC⁴; Al Jazeera⁵). In December 2025, the contractors agreed to a roughly R\$40 million (about \$7.5 million) settlement, with BYD standing as guarantor; half the money was earmarked for direct payments to the workers (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre⁶). In April 2026, Brazil's Labor Ministry added BYD to the country's official "dirty list" of employers linked to slave-like labor — only for a labor court to grant BYD an injunction removing it from that list days later, and for the government's chief labor inspector to be fired shortly after, in what inspectors' associations called political retaliation (Reuters/CNBC⁷; SCMP⁸).

These two images are not unrelated.

In the first, we see what happens when a democracy fails to exercise its moral duty to protect children — when policy cowardice and political capture allow an entirely preventable death toll to continue year after year, even as it falls.

⁴ <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c3v5n7w55kpo>

⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/>

⁶ <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/brasil-acordo-judicial-de-r40-milho%C3%B5es-encerra-caso-de-explora%C3%A7%C3%A3o-de-trabalhadores-chineses-em-obras-na-bahia/>

⁷ <https://www.cnbc.com/2026/04/07/brazil-puts-chinas-byd-on-list-of-shame-for-workers-past-slavery-like-conditions.html>

⁸ <https://www.thetrace.org/2025/07/gun-deaths-suicide-homicide-data-cdc/>

In the second, we see what happens when an authoritarian-influenced corporate and governing system produces workers who have been raised, from childhood, to understand themselves as instruments of the state rather than as human beings with dignity and rights — and what happens when even a functioning democracy's own accountability mechanisms bend under corporate and diplomatic pressure. The workers in Camaçari were not born to be enslaved. They were formed — by an educational system, a political culture, and a governing philosophy that does not recognize individual dignity as primary — into people who could be transported across the world and placed in bondage without even the basic tools of resistance. And Brazil's own struggle to hold BYD accountable — list, delist, fired regulator — shows how easily accountability itself can be undone.

The question this book poses is direct and uncomfortable:
Are we choosing to raise the next generation of American children — our grandchildren — in a governing framework that will eventually produce its own version of that factory floor, or erode the institutions that would ever hold it accountable?

The answer is: Not inevitably. But the direction of Republican policy — Project 2025, the MAGA movement, the Trump administration's deliberate dismantling of child protection infrastructure — points toward a society that values power over persons, weapons over children, and ideological conformity over democratic freedom.

The empty bedrooms of Parkland are where that road has already taken us.

The BYD factory in Brazil is where the road ends.

We are somewhere in between. And the choices being made right now will determine where we arrive.

THE MORAL IMPERATIVE: WHAT WE ALREADY KNOW

(This section draws on and extends the philosophical foundation established in *Our Collective Betrayal of America's Children*)

Every major ethical tradition — from the Christian teaching that "whoever causes one of these little ones to stumble, it would be better for them to have a millstone hung around their neck" (Matthew 18:6), to the Islamic obligation to safeguard children as among the highest aims of moral life, to the Buddhist teaching of metta (loving-kindness extending outward to all vulnerable beings), to the Ubuntu principle that "it takes a village to raise a child" — converges on a single, non-negotiable conclusion:

Children are sacred. Our duty to protect them is absolute. There is no political calculus that overrides this.

From a Kantian perspective, children must be treated as ends in themselves, never as means. This principle condemns both the labor conditions found in the BYD contractor case, AND the American political system that allows thousands of children and teenagers to be shot every year while legislators trade their safety for campaign contributions from the gun industry.

From an intergenerational justice framework, our obligations extend across time. Philosopher Hans Jonas proposed that we must "act so that the effects of your action are compatible with the permanence of genuine

human life." A society that continues to lose children to gun violence at a rate no peer democracy tolerates is not acting in accordance with the permanence of genuine human life, even as that rate improves. A government that repeatedly moves to defund the programs that help protect children who are not yet born is not acting in good faith. Edmund Burke articulated the fundamental principle: "Society is a contract... not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born."

To deliberately dismantle the protections that might save children who are not yet born is to breach that contract in the most profound possible way — even when, for a season, the numbers move the other way.

PART I: THE KILLING FIELD WE HAVE BUILT — AND THE GOOD NEWS THAT COMPLICATES IT

The Numbers, Updated Through 2026

The honest picture, as of mid-2026, is more complicated — and in some ways more hopeful — than the original edition of this book conveyed, and that complexity deserves to be told straight.

According to the Gun Violence Archive, as compiled by The Trace, the United States recorded 14,651 shooting deaths in 2025 (excluding suicides) — the lowest total since 2015, and a fourth consecutive annual decline (The Trace, "Gun Violence By The Numbers in 2025"⁹). Mass shootings fell to 408 for the year, a 19 percent decrease from 2024. Overall gun deaths, including suicides, were roughly 38,800 in 2025. That still means more than 110 people were shot every single day of the year.

Data for children specifically tells a similarly mixed story. CDC figures analyzed by The Trace show gun deaths among people younger than 18 fell nearly 14 percent, from 2,581 in 2023 to 2,227 in 2024 (The Trace¹⁰). KFF's analysis of the same underlying CDC data found the firearm death rate among children and adolescents held at 3.5 per 100,000 from 2021 to 2023 before declining to 3.0 in 2024 — an improvement, but still above pre-

⁹ <https://giffords.org/issues/kids-and-guns/>

¹⁰ <https://theconversation.com/us-violent-crime-is-at-its-lowest-in-more-than-a-century-but-the-funding-that-helped-reduce-it-is-disappearing-276834>

pandemic levels, and firearm suicide still accounted for 31 percent of child and adolescent firearm deaths in 2024. Continuing a trend already visible in the original edition, guns remain the **leading cause of death for American children and teens**, a distinction the U.S. holds among wealthy nations: 93 percent of gun deaths of children ages 0–14 across high-income countries occur in the United States alone (GIFFORDS, "Kids & Guns"¹¹).

An estimated three million children witness a shooting every year. Millions of children continue to live in homes with an unlocked, loaded firearm — estimates range from 6.7 million (Everytown, using stricter criteria) to tens of millions under broader definitions.

Why does this matter for a book about policy choices? Because the decline in violence is real, and it is worth celebrating — but it is happening despite, not because of, the policy agenda described in this book, and researchers are actively warning that the funding cuts chronicled in Part II put the trend at risk. A June 2026 analysis in *The Conversation*, drawing on University of Pennsylvania criminology research, warned explicitly that continuing cuts to violence prevention programs are likely to reverse the very decline that made 2025 look like a success story (*The Conversation*, June 2026¹²).

¹¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/28/us/politics/administration-must-restore-some-mental-health-grants-court-says.html>

¹² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2025/10/28/trump-school-mental-health-grant/>

Children in other high-income democracies remain far less likely to be killed by guns than American children. The fundamental comparison that anchored the first edition of this book has not changed, even as the specific numbers have improved.

These numbers are not destiny. They are, in significant part, a choice — and a fragile, reversible one.

The Poverty-Violence Architecture

Gun violence does not fall from the sky. It is produced by specific, measurable social conditions — and the most powerful of those conditions is poverty. Research from the CDC, the American Psychological Association, and decades of longitudinal criminology confirms: poverty is the strongest predictor of violent crime. Murder rates are 6-10 times higher in poor neighborhoods than wealthy ones. Children raised in poverty are exposed to violence at rates five times higher than children in affluent neighborhoods.

The United States has chosen — through specific, reversible policy decisions — not to eliminate poverty. The federal minimum wage remains \$7.25 per hour, unchanged since 2009 — now seventeen years. We underfund public schools in poor neighborhoods by tens of billions of dollars per year compared to affluent districts. We make healthcare unaffordable. We create conditions of desperation, and we express shock when desperate people act desperately.

We should not be shocked. We are reaping exactly what we have sown.

The same pattern applies to social isolation. Firearm suicide continues to account for more than half of all yearly gun deaths, and it is the one component of the overall gun-death total that has kept rising even as homicides and mass shootings have fallen — The Trace reported gun suicides climbed for a sixth consecutive year, to nearly 27,600, in the most recent CDC data available (The Trace, "Gun Deaths Fell in 2024, but Suicides Continued to Climb"¹³). Young men remain a disproportionately represented group in firearm suicide deaths. Loneliness among young adults, rates of major depressive episodes among adolescents, and youth suicide have all continued the upward trajectories documented in the earlier edition of this book.

These are not accidents. They are the product of a society that has systematically dismantled the infrastructure of belonging — churches, community organizations, stable employment, civic participation — while failing to replace it with anything.

And that dismantling of prevention infrastructure has, since this book's original edition, continued in some places, been partially reversed by courts and

¹³ <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/a-guide-to-where-school-mental-health-grants-stand-after-a-new-legal-twist/2025/12>

appropriators in others, and now faces renewed threats for the year ahead.

PART II: THE LOADED AGENDA — WHAT REPUBLICANS HAVE DONE, WHAT COURTS AND CONGRESS HAVE PUSHED BACK ON, AND WHAT COMES NEXT

The Systematic Dismantling of Child Protection — Updated

The Republican Party, under the direction of President Trump's second administration, Project 2025, and the MAGA movement, implemented a series of specific, documented policy decisions in 2025 that reduced child-protection infrastructure. Over the following year, courts, Congress, and public pressure reversed or softened several of these decisions — while House Republicans have already proposed repeating some of them for FY2027. This is the fuller, updated record.

What was done, and what has happened since:

- 1. The School Mental Health Grants — Canceled, Restored, and Contested Again.** In April 2025, the Trump administration canceled roughly \$1 billion in school mental health grants that had been passed into law with bipartisan support following the 2022 Uvalde massacre of 19 children and 2 teachers, funded through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. The cancellation was projected to cost roughly 1,300 mental health professionals their jobs and cut off services to hundreds of thousands of students.

In late October 2025, a federal judge ordered the administration to restore a portion of these grants (New

York Times¹⁴; Washington Post¹⁵), and reporting through December 2025 tracked a genuine "roller coaster" of restorations, re-terminations, and new legal fights over grant conditions (Education Week¹⁶; Education Week, "Funding Ends..."¹⁷). Separately, in January 2026, the administration abruptly canceled — and then, after bipartisan outcry from mental health advocates, educators, and members of Congress, reversed within a single day — nearly \$2 billion in SAMHSA mental health and addiction grants, including funding for Project AWARE, the school mental health program created after Sandy Hook (Education Week, January 2026¹⁸; New York Times¹⁹). The administration's own FY2026 budget proposal called for just \$120 million for these grants going forward — a fraction of prior funding.

The pattern that emerges is not a single clean cut, but a whiplash: cancel, litigate, restore, threaten again. For the students and school districts on the receiving end, that instability is itself corrosive — hiring and firing

¹⁴ <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/funding-ends-for-school-mental-health-projects-after-a-roller-coaster-year/2025/12>

¹⁵ <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/trump-admin-pulls-student-mental-health-grants-restores-them-a-day-later/2026/01>

¹⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/14/health/samhsa-funding-cuts.html>

¹⁷ <https://thesavir.org/newsletter/federal-funding-for-icrcs-and-firearm-violence-prevention-research-can-be-saved/>

¹⁸ <https://www.thetrace.org/2026/02/gun-violence-prevention-congress-states/>

¹⁹ <https://giffords.org/press-release/2026/06/house-republicans-advance-bill-to-defund-critical-gun-violence-prevention-programs/>

counselors is not something schools can do on a six-month cycle.

2. Community Violence Intervention Programs — Cut, and Still Cut. In April 2025, the Department of Justice terminated 365 previously awarded grants across public safety, victim services, community violence intervention, law enforcement training, juvenile justice, and criminal justice research — roughly \$500 million evaporating, affecting more than 550 organizations in 48 states (The Conversation, June 2026²⁰).

Unlike the school mental health grants, these cuts have **not** been broadly restored. As of mid-2026, organizations such as Equal Justice USA have shut down entirely after losing millions in DOJ grants; Baltimore's LifeBridge Health Center for Hope lost \$1.2 million for therapy services for gun violence survivors; and the DOJ had still not paid out roughly \$200 million in already-approved victim-services grants as of April 2026. The administration's FY2027 budget proposal calls for cutting the remaining pool of public safety and justice funds by an additional \$850 million — about 15 percent. Local governments are now also facing a "double funding cliff," as COVID-era recovery money that had partly backstopped these programs is set to expire at the end of 2026. Chicago has already cut its domestic violence prevention budget by 43 percent for 2026 as a result. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania have

²⁰ <https://bearingfreedom.com/articles/2026-04-16-massie-second-amendment-takedown/>

explicitly warned that these cuts threaten to reverse the historic drop in violent crime that the country has just achieved (The Conversation²¹).

CVI programs — which work through community trust, credible messengers, conflict mediation, de-escalation, and hospital-based intervention — remain among the most rigorously documented, cost-effective violence reduction strategies available, with research published in *Criminology & Public Policy* and *Health Affairs* showing they reduce gun violence by 40-75 percent in the communities where they operate. They work. They save lives. Their funding has largely not been restored.

3. Gun Violence Research — Zeroed Out in the House, Preserved for Now in Law, Threatened Again for FY2027. The House Republicans' FY2026 Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations bill, advanced by the House Appropriations Committee in September 2025, proposed eliminating all federal funding for firearm injury and mortality prevention research, Community and Youth Violence Prevention, the National Violent Death Reporting System, and Promise Neighborhoods.

The Senate Appropriations Committee took a different position, approving full funding — including \$25 million for firearm injury prevention research, split between the

²¹<https://www.thetrace.org/2026/06/assault-weapons-bans-supreme-court-2a/>

CDC and NIH — on a strongly bipartisan vote (SAVIR²²). The final appropriations package that passed both chambers in early 2026 preserved that \$25 million in gun violence research funding — the same level Congress has provided since ending a decades-long effective research embargo in 2019 — and, in a direct response to the chaotic grant terminations of 2025, added new guardrails requiring agencies to consult with appropriations committees and give three days' notice before canceling any grant, plus monthly briefings on grant status (The Trace, "After Trump's Cuts, Who's Going to Fund Gun Violence Prevention?"²³).

That victory was short-lived on the House side. In June 2026, the House Appropriations Committee advanced its FY2027 Labor-HHS bill, which again zeroes out all gun violence prevention research (a \$25 million cut), Youth Violence Prevention (\$18.1 million), and Promise Neighborhoods (\$91 million) (GIFFORDS, June 2026²⁴). As GIFFORDS stated: "This bill completely eliminates gun violence prevention research that is critical to fighting the gun violence epidemic we face as a country." Whether the Senate again restores this funding for FY2027 was still undecided as of this writing.

²² <https://www.padilla.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/padilla-schiff-murphy-blumenthal-mcbath-reintroduce-assault-weapons-ban/>

²³ <https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/02/04/us-trump-administrations-pervasive-attacks-on-rights>

²⁴ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2026/country-chapters/united-states>

You cannot solve a problem you are not allowed to study, and you cannot rely on funding that must be re-fought every single year. Defunding research is not a neutral act — it is a deliberate, repeated strategy that forces advocates to spend their limited capacity refighting the same battle annually rather than building on progress.

4. Expanding the Lethal Arsenal — Mixed Legislative Results. While cutting prevention funding, the Republican agenda simultaneously pushed to expand access to the most dangerous weapons, with uneven success:

- In February 2025, President Trump signed an executive order directing the Attorney General to review all gun regulations from 2021-2025 and develop a plan to "protect Second Amendment rights."
- The Senate Republican provision to eliminate National Firearms Act taxes on silencers and short-barreled rifles and shotguns moved forward in the "Big Beautiful Bill" process in mid-2025, continuing a nearly 100-year-old regulatory framework's erosion.
- Representative Thomas Massie (R-KY) reintroduced the "Safe Students Act" (H.R. 5066) in 2025 to repeal the federal Gun-Free School Zones Act. As of mid-2026 the bill has not passed the House; Massie continued to press the issue in congressional testimony into April 2026, alongside a broader slate of proposals including

national permitless carry (Bearing Freedom, April 2026²⁵).

- Project 2025 proposals to redirect Title I education funds toward arming teachers, and Republican Study Committee proposals to eliminate red flag laws, remain live policy proposals rather than enacted law as of mid-2026.
- **The Supreme Court has now taken direct action.** On June 30, 2026, the Court agreed to hear two combined challenges — *Viramontes v. Cook County* (Illinois) and *Grant v. Higgins* (Connecticut) — to state and local assault weapons bans, including bans on AR-15-style rifles (The Trace, June 30, 2026²⁶). The case will be argued in the term beginning in October 2026, with a ruling possible by mid-2027. It follows two other Second Amendment rulings the Court issued earlier in its term, including a June 2025 decision (*Snope v. Brown*) declining to disturb Maryland's assault weapons ban. The outcome of *Viramontes/Grant* could determine the constitutional fate of assault weapons bans nationwide.

The pattern remains largely unambiguous: push to cut prevention funding, push to expand access, push to eliminate oversight — with courts, the Senate, and now the Supreme Court all becoming battlegrounds where these efforts are being fought to a draw rather than uniformly succeeding or failing.

²⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/03/01/byd-slavery-allegations-brazil/>

²⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BYD_Brazil_working_conditions_controversy

5. DOGE and the Broader Assault on Children's Programs — Contested, Ongoing. The Department of Government Efficiency, launched under Elon Musk in 2025, proposed cuts that would have cost children's programs over \$101 billion. House Republicans separately pushed for close to \$1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid and SNAP.

Many of these proposals moved through 2025 budget and reconciliation fights with mixed final outcomes at the program level — some cuts were scaled back in final legislation, others were enacted, and the overall trajectory of the FY2026 and proposed FY2027 budgets continued to disproportionately target programs serving low-income children relative to their share of federal spending, according to the Senate Finance Committee's "WAR ON KIDS" analysis and First Focus on Children's continuing budget tracking. The core imbalance this book documented — children represent roughly a quarter of the population but a small single-digit share of the federal budget devoted to their wellbeing — has not been corrected.

6. The Blocked Path Forward. Democrats have not been passive. In April 2025, Senators Padilla, Schiff, Murphy, Blumenthal, and McBath reintroduced the *Assault Weapons Ban of 2025*. The bill advanced further than many observers initially expected: the Senate Judiciary Committee passed an amended version in June 2025, and reporting at the time indicated a committee-level vote of 25-11. It has not, however, received a full Senate

floor vote as of mid-2026, and its path to becoming law in a Republican-controlled Senate remains effectively blocked absent a change in the Senate's composition or rules.

Everytown for Gun Safety, GIFFORDS, the Brady Campaign, and March For Our Lives have continued to document, publicize, and organize against the broader deregulatory agenda throughout 2025 and 2026.

The historical evidence Padilla and his co-sponsors cited remains salient: the original 1994 assault weapons ban was associated with a 37 percent drop in gun massacres and a 70 percent reduction in mass shooting deaths; after it expired in 2004, mass-shooting fatalities rose 239 percent (Sen. Padilla's office²⁷). Whether the Supreme Court's newly accepted case affirms or narrows that regulatory approach will likely be the single most consequential gun-policy development of the next eighteen months.

The Authoritarian Permission Structure — Reassessed for 2026

There is a dimension of this crisis that goes beyond specific policy. It concerns the cultural and psychological environment that the MAGA movement has created — and independent human rights monitors have continued to sound alarms about it through 2026. Human Rights

²⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/society-equity/brazil-prosecutors-sue-byd-violating-labor-rights-2025-05-27/>

Watch's February 2026 World Report devoted a full chapter to the United States, describing "pervasive attacks on rights" and noting, among other findings, that 32 immigrants died in ICE custody in 2025 with four more deaths recorded in the first weeks of 2026, and that the U.S. incarcerates young people at more than twice the global average (HRW, "US: Trump Administration's Pervasive Attacks on Rights"²⁸; HRW World Report 2026²⁹). Foreign Policy has continued to track what it calls America's drift toward "constitutional authoritarianism" — a system where democratic forms remain intact but are hollowed out in function.

When a political movement built on dehumanization, scapegoating, and contempt for institutions gains power, it creates what social psychologists call a "permission structure" for violence. When political opponents are named as "enemies of the people," when migrants are framed as invaders, when the rule of law is subordinated to political loyalty — the cultural message to young people in despair is not neutral. It is: **violence is not only acceptable; it is patriotic.**

School shooters do not emerge from a vacuum. They emerge from cultural contexts. That the topline gun-death numbers improved in 2025-2026 does not mean this cultural ecology has healed — firearm suicide, the

²⁸ <https://apnews.com/article/brazil-byd-electric-vehicles-court-labor-trafficking-95974dd85ce95edac339ba316be4c2de>

²⁹ <https://cri.org/brazil-ensure-implementation-forced-labor-settlement-byd/>

component of gun deaths most directly tied to isolation and despair, kept climbing even as headline violence fell.

PART III: THE CHINA MIRROR — UPDATED WITH THE CASE'S FULL ARC

"They Came to Build China's EV Future" — What Happened Next

In December 2024, Brazilian labor inspectors arrived at a construction site in Camaçari, Bahia, following an anonymous tip. What they found was later described in a Washington Post headline: "They came to build China's EV future. Investigators found 'slavery-like' conditions" (Washington Post, March 2026³⁰).

The facts, documented by Reuters, BBC, Al Jazeera, CNN, and the Associated Press: labor authorities and federal prosecutors ultimately identified 471 Chinese workers who had entered Brazil illegally, and rescued 163 of them from conditions found at the construction site of a factory being built for BYD by the contractor Jinjiang Group. Earlier reporting cited 220 rescued workers; Brazil's Labor Ministry's later, more precise figure was 163. Workers had 107 passports confiscated, had up to 70 percent of their wages withheld, slept on beds without mattresses, shared one toilet among 31 people, and needed permission to leave their lodgings.

The workers were subjected to contracts that violated labor laws in both Brazil and China — contracts allowing the employer to unilaterally extend the labor agreement,

³⁰ <https://money.usnews.com/investing/news/articles/2026-04-09/brazil-court-removes-byd-from-list-of-firms-linked-to-forced-labor>

to fine workers 200 yuan for conduct such as "swearing, quarreling, or walking around shirtless," and to require a nearly \$900 deposit recoverable only after six months of labor.

What has happened since the original edition of this book:

By early January 2025, all the affected workers had received termination payments and returned to China (Wikipedia, citing contemporaneous reporting³¹).

In May 2025, Brazilian prosecutors formally sued BYD and its contractors for 257 million reais (about \$45-50 million), describing the workers as "victims of international human trafficking" subjected to "extremely degrading" conditions (Reuters³²; AP³³; BBC³⁴). BYD stated it had "zero tolerance for breaches of human rights and labor regulations" and cut ties with Jinjiang; Jinjiang contested the characterization.

In December 2025, the contractors — Jinjiang and Tecmonta — reached a roughly R\$40 million (about \$7.5 million) settlement with Bahia's Labor Prosecutor's Office, with BYD standing as guarantor of payment. Half the settlement was earmarked for direct compensation to the workers, half for collective damages directed to labor-

³¹<https://www.hrw.org/feature/2026/01/20/sliding-towards-authoritarianism>

³²<https://www.everytown.org>

³³<https://giffords.org>

³⁴<https://www.bradyunited.org>

rights institutions. Climate Rights International raised concerns in January 2026 that, because most affected workers had already returned to China, verifying they actually received their payments would be difficult, and called for independent oversight of the settlement's implementation (Climate Rights International, January 2026³⁵).

Then, in a remarkable coda, Brazil's Labor Ministry added BYD to the country's official registry of employers linked to slavery-like conditions on April 7, 2026 — only for a labor court judge to issue a provisional injunction removing BYD from that list within three days, on the grounds that the listing decision was potentially improper because it treated BYD, rather than only its contractors, as the responsible employer (Reuters/CNBC, April 2026³⁶; Reuters/US News, April 2026³⁷). Days after that reversal, Brazil's government fired Luiz Felipe Brandão de Mello, the head of its National Secretariat of Labour Inspection since 2023 — the official who had led the unit that placed BYD on the list. Brazil's national association of labor inspectors called the firing "institutional retaliation" tied directly to the BYD blacklisting and filed a case at Brazil's Supreme Court challenging the legal provision that let the

³⁵ <https://marchforourlives.com>

³⁶ <https://publichealth.jhu.edu/center-for-gun-violence-solutions>

³⁷ <https://www.thetrace.org>

labor minister intervene in a completed enforcement proceeding (South China Morning Post, April 2026³⁸).

In December 2025, workers still employed at the completed BYD plant — which by then had manufactured over 25,000 vehicles — staged demonstrations over unsanitary bathrooms, inadequate pay, and lack of access to drinking water, according to Brazilian human rights monitors, suggesting the underlying labor conditions concerns extended beyond the original 2024 construction-phase scandal.

What This Means for Our Grandchildren

The BYD case is not primarily about a bad employer or an irresponsible subcontractor — and its unfinished aftermath is, if anything, more instructive than the original scandal. It is a window into what happens when a governing and economic system — built on the premise that individual persons are instruments of state and economic power rather than ends in themselves — produces human beings who can be treated this way, and into how fragile accountability for that treatment can be even inside a functioning democracy with courts, a free press, and civil society. Brazil caught the abuse, sued over it, settled it, tried to formally sanction the company responsible — and then reversed that sanction and fired the official who imposed it, all within the same month.

³⁸<https://firstfocus.org>

The Chinese workers at Camaçari did not arrive in Brazil with no conception of rights. They arrived from a society where the state defines acceptable thought and expression, individual rights are subordinated to collective goals, labor is understood primarily as a resource to be optimized, and children are educated within a framework emphasizing loyalty to the party and the national project over individual flourishing.

This is not an anti-China screed. It is an analysis of what authoritarian governance produces in human beings over time, and of how easily even democratic accountability structures can be outmaneuvered by economic and diplomatic pressure — a pressure any government, including our own, is subject to.

Now ask: What tools is the American governing system equipping our grandchildren with? If we defund the education systems that teach critical thinking and civic participation, eliminate the mental health services that help young people develop resilience, cut the social safety nets that give families the material security to resist economic coercion, normalize the dehumanization of political opponents, and cultivate contempt for independent institutions — including labor inspectors, courts, and a free press — we are not building a generation that will resist exploitation. We are building a generation more susceptible to accepting it, not because they are weak, but because we will have stripped them of

the resources, the knowledge, and the cultural framework to do otherwise.

That is the comparison. That is the warning. That is why this matters.

The Distinction That Must Be Maintained

To be clear: The United States is not China, and Brazil is not the United States. Brazil's courts, labor inspectors, and free press did ultimately expose the BYD case, force a settlement, and attempt formal sanctions — the system worked, however imperfectly, and however much that work was subsequently contested. That capacity for self-correction is itself the point: it is precisely what a healthy democracy retains and what an authoritarian state does not. The comparison to authoritarianism is not a claim of equivalence but of trajectory and of vigilance about which institutions are being weakened.

The question is not "Are we there yet?" The question remains: **"Are we heading there? And if so, how fast? And what would it take to turn around?"**

Human Rights Watch's most recent U.S. country assessment (February 2026) continued to document what it characterizes as sliding toward authoritarianism, and Foreign Policy has continued similar coverage through

the first half of 2026 (HRW³⁹; HRW, "Sliding Towards Authoritarianism?"⁴⁰).

Every mile traveled on that road makes the next mile easier. And every program cut, every institution weakened, every child left without mental health services, every young person raised in poverty without hope, is a brick in that road — regardless of what the annual gun death total happens to be that year.

³⁹ <https://www.childrensdefense.org>

⁴⁰ <https://nlihc.org>

PART IV: WHO IS ACTUALLY FIGHTING FOR CHILDREN

The Organizations on the Front Lines

While the federal government has repeatedly retreated from and then partially restored child protection funding, a network of organizations continues to fight — and, in 2025-2026, continues to document exactly how each retreat and restoration unfolds. For CCRC residents and older Americans who want to act, these are the partners waiting for your support:

Gun Violence Prevention:

- **Everytown for Gun Safety** (everytown.org⁴¹) — tracks all Trump administration gun policy actions; provides action alerts; funds research
- **GIFFORDS** (giffords.org⁴²) — advocacy and legal work; tracks every gun violence prevention funding cut, including the newly proposed FY2027 cuts
- **Brady: United Against Gun Violence** (bradyunited.org⁴³) — policy advocacy and survivor support
- **March For Our Lives** (marchforourlives.com⁴⁴) — youth-led movement; intergenerational organizing

⁴¹<https://cvg.org>

⁴²<https://www.commoncause.org>

⁴³<https://indivisible.org>

⁴⁴<https://www.hrw.org>

- **Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions** (publichealth.jhu.edu⁴⁵) — research and evidence base
- **The Trace** (thetrace.org⁴⁶) — nonpartisan journalism and data tracking on gun violence trends and policy

Children's Economic Security:

- **First Focus on Children** (firstfocus.org⁴⁷) — tracks federal budget impacts on children; "WAR ON KIDS" analysis
- **Children's Defense Fund** (childrensdefense.org⁴⁸) — comprehensive child advocacy
- **National Low Income Housing Coalition** (nlihc.org⁴⁹) — housing security for families
- **National SNAP Coalition** — defending food assistance

Community Violence Intervention:

- **Cure Violence Global** (cvg.org⁵⁰) — community-based violence interruption
- **Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions directory** — find local CVI programs

⁴⁵ <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

⁴⁶ <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>

⁴⁷ <https://www.thetrace.org/2026/01/shooting-gun-violence-data-america-q4-2025/>

⁴⁸ <https://www.thetrace.org/2026/04/shooting-gun-violence-data-america-q1-2026/>

⁴⁹ <https://www.everytown.org/issues/child-teen-safety/>

⁵⁰ <https://massie.house.gov/news/documentquery.aspx?Year=2025>

Democratic Renewal:

- **Common Cause** (commoncause.org⁵¹) — democracy and governance reform
- **Indivisible** (indivisible.org⁵²) — grassroots resistance and organizing
- **Human Rights Watch** (hrw.org⁵³) — independent monitoring of U.S. rights trends

⁵¹ <https://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/en/direitos-humanos/noticia/2026-04/chinese-carmaker-byd-added-brazils-forced-labor-list>

⁵² <https://www.cdc.gov>

⁵³

PART V: WHAT CCRC RESIDENTS MUST DO

The Uncomfortable Truth About Our Complicity

As established in the companion volume: Many of us who live in Continuing Care Retirement Communities came of age in an era of expanding opportunity.

We had decent jobs, affordable housing, accessible healthcare, and vibrant communities. We benefited from the social contract that previous generations built. And now — having benefited from those structures — many of us are presiding, through our silence, over their dismantling.

The pattern this book documents — cut, litigate, restore, threaten again — depends on organized pressure to tip toward restoration each time. When courts and Congress reversed the school mental health grant cuts and preserved gun violence research funding in the FY2026 cycle, that did not happen automatically. It happened because advocacy organizations, affected school districts, and members of both parties made noise. The FY2027 fight over the same funding is happening right now.

This is the choice our silence makes: that our comfort matters more than children's lives.

This is not true of all older Americans. There are many who are organizing, fighting, and refusing to be comfortable with injustice. This call is not to shame the engaged. It is to wake those who have retreated.

We have time. We have resources. We have experience. We have networks. We have communities where we can organize collectively. We have the freedom that comes from reaching a stage of life where we have fewer obligations and, for many, more material security.

To refuse to use all of this for the survival of children is a choice. And it is a choice with consequences measured in lives.

The CCRC Action Plan: Updated for Mid-2026

Immediate (This Week):

7. Call Congress. The Congressional switchboard is (202) 224-3121. Every call counts. The message: *"I am a [age]-year-old resident of [city]. I am calling about [specific issue: FY2027 gun violence research funding / CVI programs / the Viramontes/Grant Supreme Court case / Medicaid cuts]. I want [Representative/Senator's name] to [specific action: restore funding / support legislation / oppose cuts]. Children's safety is a moral emergency, and the progress we've made is fragile."*

8. Contact your Representative and Senators directly:

- House: house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative⁵⁴
- Senate: senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm⁵⁵

⁵⁴

⁵⁵

9. **Sign up for action alerts** from Everytown, GIFFORDS, Brady Campaign, First Focus on Children, and The Trace's newsletter. With the FY2027 appropriations fight and the Supreme Court's new assault-weapons case both underway, these organizations will tell you exactly when and how to act in the months ahead.

Short-Term (This Month):

10. **Organize a Letter-Writing Day** at your CCRC. Provide templates, addresses, stamps. Make it social — coffee and cookies, a speaker, a sense of purpose. Aim for 50-100 letters from your community on a single day. Volume matters.
11. **Write a letter to the editor** of your local newspaper. A 150-word letter from a CCRC resident, a grandparent, a retired professional, carries weight.
12. **Research your local CVI programs.** Use the Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions directory. Find out which programs in your city lost federal funding in 2025 and whether they have found alternative support. Consider fundraising to support their work directly, since federal restoration for CVI specifically — unlike the research funding and some mental health grants — has largely not materialized.

Medium-Term (Next 3 Months):

13. **Establish a CCRC Action Group** focused specifically on child safety and gun violence prevention.

Monthly meetings. A phone tree. A shared action calendar.

14. **Host a community forum** on gun violence and Republican policy, including the pending Supreme Court case on assault weapons bans and the FY2027 appropriations fight. Invite a gun violence prevention researcher, a local CVI director, or a survivor.
15. **Connect with young activists.** Invite March For Our Lives representatives or local youth organizers to speak at your community.
16. **Support primary challengers** who run on gun violence prevention and child safety.

Ongoing:

17. **Vote strategically.** Older voters have among the highest turnout of any demographic. Your votes carry exceptional weight.
18. **Donate.** Even small, regular donations to Everytown, Brady, GIFFORDS, March For Our Lives, or your local CVI programs add up.
19. **Tell your story.** Write op-eds. Speak at community meetings. Share this book. Use every platform you have.

PART VI: THE FUTURE BEING BUILT

Two Paths

There are two futures being built simultaneously in America today. Which one prevails depends entirely on choices being made right now — by legislators, by voters, by communities, by CCRC residents deciding whether to act or remain comfortable. The events of the past year show both paths still very much in play: courts and Congress restored some funding; the administration and House Republicans have already moved to cut it again for the year ahead; and the Supreme Court will likely decide, within the next year, whether entire categories of state gun regulation can survive at all.

Path One: The MAGA Trajectory

Medicaid and SNAP cuts leave millions of children with less economic security. Mental health funding remains one legal fight away from disappearing from schools again. CVI programs, already gutted, face a further 15 percent cut and the looming expiration of COVID-era backstop funds at the end of 2026 — a "double funding cliff" that researchers warn could reverse the recent decline in violence. Firearm suicide continues its multi-year climb even as other gun deaths fall. The Supreme Court could, within a year, strike down state assault weapons bans nationwide. Independent human rights monitors continue to document a broader slide toward what one journal calls "constitutional authoritarianism."

At the end of that road: a society where children's outcomes are determined not by their inherent dignity and the community's commitment to their flourishing, but by their utility to an economic and political order that has learned to treat human beings as instruments — and where even a functioning democracy's accountability mechanisms, as Brazil's own struggle with the BYD case shows, can be hollowed out or overridden.

Path Two: The Democratic Renewal

Mental health funding is restored permanently rather than fought over annually. CVI programs receive sustained, multi-year federal investment. Poverty is attacked through living wages, affordable housing, universal healthcare, and quality public education. The Supreme Court affirms states' authority to regulate the most dangerous weapons. The Assault Weapons Ban of 2025 reaches the Senate floor with the votes to pass. Universal background checks are enacted. Firearm suicide is addressed directly through means-restriction policy and expanded crisis care. Children grow up in communities that have invested in their belonging, their safety, and their capacity to choose their own futures.

At the end of that road: children who come home from school. Alyssa Alhadeff's toothpaste cap, recapped.

The Moral Choice

Hannah Arendt wrote that educators have a "double responsibility" — to protect children from the world while simultaneously preparing them to renew it.

The improving topline numbers of 2025-2026 do not resolve this responsibility; if anything, they make the argument for sustained investment sharper, because they show that when prevention infrastructure is funded and supported, outcomes improve. The question before every reader of this book is not primarily political, though it has political dimensions. It is existential and moral:

What kind of people are we, that we accept any level of preventable child death as the price of our political comfort — and that we let hard-won progress hang on which party controls one committee in one chamber of Congress each budget cycle?

CONCLUSION: THE EMPTY ROOMS ARE WAITING FOR AN ANSWER

Lou Bopp's photographs — the unmade beds, the scattered homework, the uncapped toothpaste tubes — are not history. They are prophecy. They are what is coming, in house after house, community after community, school after school, if the funding cuts, weakened oversight, and expanded weapons access described in this book are allowed to outlast the current, fragile improvement in the topline numbers.

In Brazil, more than 160 workers came to build an electric vehicle factory and found themselves in conditions their rescuers described as analogous to slavery. Brazil's system caught it, sued over it, and settled it — and then, within days of formally sanctioning the company most responsible, reversed that sanction and fired the official who issued it. That is not a story of authoritarian failure. It is a story of how fragile democratic accountability is even when it works.

We are not there. But we are building, piece by piece, the conditions for something similar — not in a BYD factory, but in the poverty traps, the isolated schools without counselors, the communities without CVI programs, the homes without healthcare, the futures without hope — and in the annual, exhausting fight to keep the programs that address those problems funded at all.

The solutions are known. They are not mysterious or radical. They have been implemented in other wealthy

democracies. They work — the recent decline in U.S. gun violence, however partial and fragile, is itself evidence that they work here too.

The only thing standing between us and sustaining those solutions is political will — and political will is something that organized, engaged, persistent citizens can create.

CCRC residents: You have time. You have resources. You have voices. You have votes. You have networks and experience and moral authority accumulated over decades of living.

Use them.

The empty rooms are waiting.

The children who should be in them — who are being born right now, who will enter kindergarten in five years, who will sit in schools that may or may not have counselors, who will grow up in communities that may or may not have CVI programs, who will come of age in a country that may or may not have decided that their lives matter more than campaign contributions from the gun lobby —

Those children are waiting, too.

What will you do?

APPENDIX A: THE REPUBLICAN POLICY RECORD — A DOCUMENTED TIMELINE (UPDATED THROUGH JULY 2026)

Date	Action	Impact on Children
Jan 2025	Trump dismantles White House Office for Gun Violence Prevention on Day 1	Eliminates federal coordination on gun violence
Feb 2025	Trump signs EO "Protecting Second Amendment Rights"	Directs review/reversal of gun safety regulations 2021-2025
Apr 2025	DOJ terminates 365 grants across public safety, CVI, victim services, and justice research; ~\$500M lost	CVI programs serving highest-violence cities collapse; largely still not restored as of mid-2026
Apr 2025	~\$1B in school mental health grants canceled	775,000 students at risk of losing mental health services; 1,300

		professionals at risk of job loss
Oct 2025	Federal court orders partial restoration of school mental health grants	Some, not all, services and jobs preserved; litigation continued through year-end
May 2025	House Republicans propose ~\$1T in Medicaid/SNAP cuts	Millions of children at risk of losing healthcare and food assistance
Jun 2025	Senate Judiciary Committee advances amended Assault Weapons Ban of 2025 (25-11)	Bill has not reached full Senate floor vote as of mid-2026
Jun-Jul 2025	Senate Republicans advance NFA deregulation (silencers, short-barrel firearms) in "Big Beautiful Bill"	Nearly century-old regulatory framework loosened
Jul 2025	Reuters: Trump	Hundreds of

	admin cut over 50% of federal gun violence prevention funding to that point	millions in violence prevention funding eliminated
Aug 2025	Rep. Massie reintroduces Safe Students Act (H.R. 5066) to repeal Gun-Free School Zones Act	Bill has not passed the House as of mid-2026
Sep 2025	House FY2026 budget proposes \$0 for gun violence research and CVI programs	Superseded by final bipartisan appropriations deal
Jan 2026	Enacted FY2026 appropriations preserve \$25M gun violence research funding; adds grant-termination guardrails	Research funding continues; new procedural protection against abrupt future cuts
Jan 2026	HHS abruptly cancels, then	Illustrates ongoing instability in

	restores within a day, ~\$2B in SAMHSA mental health/addiction grants incl. Project AWARE	federal mental-health funding for schools
Feb 2026	Human Rights Watch's World Report 2026 documents broad "pervasive attacks on rights" in the U.S.	Contextualizes child-protection cuts within wider institutional erosion
Apr 2026	Brazil blacklists, then delists, BYD over forced-labor findings; fires chief labor inspector	Illustrates fragility of democratic accountability under corporate/political pressure
Apr 2026	Massie testifies for national permitless carry, GFSZA repeal, and related measures	Signals continued push to expand firearm access near schools
Jun 2026	House Appropriations Committee	Sets up a repeat of the FY2026 funding fight

	advances FY2027 bill again zeroing out gun violence research, Youth Violence Prevention, and Promise Neighborhoods	
Jun 30, 2026	Supreme Court agrees to hear <i>Viramontes v. Cook County</i> and <i>Grant v. Higgins</i> on assault weapons bans	Ruling (expected by mid-2027) could determine the constitutional fate of assault weapons bans nationwide

APPENDIX B: WHAT WORKS — THE EVIDENCE

Intervention	Evidence Base	Effect Size
Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs	<i>Criminology & Public Policy; Health Affairs</i>	Reduce gun violence 40-75% in target areas
School-based mental health counselors	American School Counselor Association	Significantly lower violence and suicide rates
Red flag / extreme risk laws	Multiple state studies	Reduce firearm suicide rates by 7-14%
Assault weapons ban (1994-2004)	<i>Criminology & Public Policy</i> ; Sen. Padilla's office	Mass shooting fatalities and deaths declined during ban period; deaths rose 239% after expiration
Universal background checks	Multiple studies	Reduce trafficking and straw purchases
Safe storage laws	Harvard Injury Control Research Center	Reduce child gun deaths and teen suicide
Living wage policies	Economic Policy Institute	Reduce poverty → reduce violent

		crime
Early childhood education (Head Start)	Multiple longitudinal studies	Long-term reductions in criminal behavior and poverty
Affordable housing programs	National Low Income Housing Coalition	Reduce material desperation → reduce violence
Universal healthcare with mental health coverage	WHO comparative data	Lower suicide rates than U.S. system
Sustained, multi-year violence-prevention funding (as opposed to annual cuts/restorations)	University of Pennsylvania criminology research, cited in <i>The Conversation</i> , June 2026	Funding instability itself identified as a risk factor for reversing recent violence declines

APPENDIX C: QUICK ACTION GUIDE FOR CCRC RESIDENTS

Immediate (This Week)

20. Call Congress: (202) 224-3121

- Demand: Permanent, multi-year school mental health funding (not annual fights)
- Demand: Restore and sustain CVI funding
- Demand: Oppose FY2027 cuts to gun violence research
- Support: Assault Weapons Ban of 2025 reaching a Senate floor vote

21. Find your representatives:

- house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative⁵⁶
- senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm⁵⁷

22. Sign up for alerts:

- everytown.org⁵⁸
- giffords.org⁵⁹
- bradyunited.org⁶⁰
- firstfocus.org⁶¹
- thetrace.org⁶²

⁵⁶

⁵⁷

⁵⁸

⁵⁹

⁶⁰

⁶¹

⁶²

This Month

23. Organize a letter-writing day — 50-100 letters as a community
24. Write a letter to your local newspaper editor (150 words — do it today)
25. Research your local CVI program (Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Violence Solutions⁶³)
26. Share this book with five people

Next 3 Months

27. Establish a CCRC Action Group — monthly meetings, shared calendar
28. Host a community forum — invite a gun violence researcher or CVI director
29. Connect with March For Our Lives or local youth organizers
30. Recruit 10-20 residents for monthly calls to Congress

Ongoing

31. **Vote strategically** — primary and general elections; make child safety non-negotiable
32. **Donate** — even \$25/month to Everytown, Brady, GIFFORDS, or a local CVI program
33. **Mentor a young activist** — ask what they need, offer your experience and networks

63

34. **Tell your story** — op-eds, community talks, social media; your voice has moral authority

REFERENCES

35. The Trace. (2025, December 30/31). Gun Violence By The Numbers in 2025. thetrace.org⁶⁴
36. The Trace. (2026, January 13). By the Numbers: Gun Violence in Q4 2025. thetrace.org⁶⁵
37. The Trace. (2026, April 13). The Data on Gun Violence in America, Q1 2026. thetrace.org⁶⁶
38. The Trace. (2025, July 29). Gun Deaths Fell in 2024, but Suicides Continued to Climb. thetrace.org⁶⁷
39. GIFFORDS. (2026, April 8). Kids & Guns. giffords.org⁶⁸
40. GIFFORDS. (2026, June 10). House Republicans advance bill to defund critical gun violence prevention programs. giffords.org⁶⁹
41. Everytown for Gun Safety. Child & Teen Gun Safety. everytown.org⁷⁰
42. The Conversation. (2026, June 28). US violent crime is at its lowest in more than a century — but the funding that helped reduce it is disappearing. theconversation.com⁷¹

64

65

66

67

68

69

70

71

43. The New York Times. (2025, October 28/29). Administration Must Restore Some Mental Health Grants, Court Says. [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)⁷²
44. The Washington Post. (2025, October 28). Judge orders Trump administration to restore school mental health grants. [washingtonpost.com](https://www.washingtonpost.com)⁷³
45. Education Week. (2025, December). A Guide to Where School Mental Health Grants Stand After a New Legal Twist. [edweek.org](https://www.edweek.org)⁷⁴
46. Education Week. (2026, January 15). Trump Admin. Pulls Student Mental Health Grants, Restores Them a Day Later. [edweek.org](https://www.edweek.org)⁷⁵
47. The New York Times. (2026, January 14). H.H.S. Reverses Decision to Cut \$2 Billion for Mental Health and Addiction Grants. [nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com)⁷⁶
48. SAVIR. (2025, December 1). Federal Funding for ICRCs and Firearm Violence Prevention Research Can Be Saved. [thesavir.org](https://www.thesavir.org)⁷⁷
49. The Trace. (2026, February 3). After Trump's Cuts, Who's Going to Fund Gun Violence Prevention? [thetrace.org](https://www.thetrace.org)⁷⁸

⁷²

⁷³

⁷⁴

⁷⁵

⁷⁶

⁷⁷

⁷⁸

50. The Trace. (2026, June 30). Supreme Court Agrees to Take Up Assault Weapons Bans. thetrace.org⁷⁹
51. Senator Alex Padilla's Office. (2025, April 30). Padilla, Schiff, Murphy, Blumenthal, McBath Reintroduce Assault Weapons Ban of 2025. padilla.senate.gov⁸⁰
52. Congressman Thomas Massie's Office. (2025, June/August). Massie Reintroduces Safe Students Act. massie.house.gov⁸¹
53. Bearing Freedom. (2026, April 16). Thomas Massie just gave the best Second Amendment speech in Congress this year. bearingfreedom.com⁸²
54. Human Rights Watch. (2026, February 4). US: Trump Administration's Pervasive Attacks on Rights. hrw.org⁸³
55. Human Rights Watch. (2026). World Report 2026: Rights Trends in United States. hrw.org⁸⁴
56. Human Rights Watch. (2026, January 20). Sliding Towards Authoritarianism? hrw.org⁸⁵
57. Washington Post. (2026, March). They came to build China's EV future. Investigators found 'slavery-like' conditions. washingtonpost.com⁸⁶

79

80

81

82

83

84

85

86

58. BBC. (2025, May 27/28). Brazil sues China carmaker BYD over 'slave-like' conditions. [bbc.com](https://www.bbc.com)⁸⁷
59. Al Jazeera. (2025, May 27). Brazilian prosecutors sue Chinese carmaker BYD over labour conditions. [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com)⁸⁸
60. Reuters/Associated Press. (2025, May 27). Brazilian prosecutors sue Chinese carmaker BYD over allegations of slave-like labor conditions. apnews.com⁸⁹
61. Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. (2026, May 7). Brazil: R\$40 Million judicial agreement ends case of exploitation of Chinese workers on BYD construction sites in Bahia. business-humanrights.org⁹⁰
62. Climate Rights International. (2026, January 9). Brazil: Ensure Implementation of Forced Labor Settlement with BYD. cri.org⁹¹
63. CNBC/Reuters. (2026, April 7/8). Brazil puts China's BYD on list of shame for workers' past slavery-like conditions. cnbc.com⁹²
64. Reuters/US News. (2026, April 9/11). Brazilian court removes BYD from list of firms linked to forced labor. usnews.com⁹³

⁸⁷

⁸⁸

⁸⁹

⁹⁰

⁹¹

⁹²

⁹³

65. South China Morning Post. (2026, April 14). Brazil fires slave labour watchdog chief after BYD blacklisting. [scmp.com](https://www.scmp.com)⁹⁴
66. Agência Brasil. (2026, April 8). Chinese carmaker BYD added to Brazil's forced labor list. agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br⁹⁵
67. Wikipedia. BYD Brazil working conditions controversy. en.wikipedia.org⁹⁶
68. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Leading causes of death — children and teens. [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)⁹⁷
69. KFF. (2026). Analysis of CDC child and adolescent firearm mortality data.
70. Harvard Injury Control Research Center. (2019). Violent death rates in US vs. high-income countries. *Preventive Medicine*, 123, 20-26.

This book was researched and written with the assistance of Perplexity AI. This edition was updated in July 2026 to reflect policy, legal, and statistical developments through late June 2026.

Mel Haas is a retired Aeronautical Engineer, father of six children, grandfather of six, and great-grandfather of three. He is a resident of a Continuing Care Retirement Community in Silver Spring, Maryland, and is outraged by the decades of fear and terror inflicted on children by political apathy and

⁹⁴

⁹⁵

⁹⁶

⁹⁷

captured governance. He believes AI can help find and report the answers to questions everyone should be asking.

Original edition: March 2026. Updated edition: July 2026.

Word Count: ~11,500 words (expandable for KDP; target 60-80 pages at standard KDP formatting)

Amazon KDP Categories:

- Politics & Social Sciences > Political Science > Public Policy > Social Services & Welfare
- Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Violence in Society
- Law > Constitutional Law > Second Amendment
- Politics & Social Sciences > Activism & Social Justice

Keywords: gun violence children, Project 2025 children, Republican cuts children programs, MAGA school safety, gun violence prevention funding, BYD Brazil slavery, authoritarian governance children, CCRC activism, grandparents gun violence, child safety Trump, assault weapons ban Supreme Court, intergenerational activism

Subtitle options:

- *How Republican Policies Are Guaranteeing More Child Deaths from Gun Violence*
- *Republican Policy, China's Warning, and the Fragile Progress We Cannot Afford to Lose*
- *A CCRC Resident's Call to Action Against the Policies That Are Killing Our Grandchildren*

Companion volume to: *Our Collective Betrayal of America's Children*

Tone: Moral urgency, evidence-based, direct challenge to older Americans, accessible to general readers, grounded in documented policy record, honest about both the progress made and the fragility of that progress

Target Audience: CCRC residents and older Americans, parents and grandparents concerned about child safety, Democratic activists, community organizers, gun violence prevention advocates, anyone who wants the documented policy record — updated and honest about mixed results — in one place